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The Abomination of Desolation

Mark 13:14-23

Jesus spoke of one event that begins the end. Up until this time, since the beginning of the church age there has been deceptions, wars and rumors of wars, natural disasters and persecutions. Jesus told us these four problems would be in the world. But they are not signs of the end. Jesus said, *“do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet”* (13:7). Jesus called these the beginnings of birth pains (13:8). They have been going on for about 2,000 years. John wrote about 2,000 years ago that they were in *“the last hour”* (1 John 2:18). Time is progressing mighty slow. Just as **birth pains increase as the time draws nearer** so these are going to increase as we draw closer to the coming events Jesus told His followers to watch for, beginning with the Abomination of Desolation. Jesus said, *“So when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not”* (let the reader understand), *“then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”* What is this Abomination of Desolation? First, let us look at the words, then we will look at the phrase, and then the scriptures.

The word abomination is mentioned over 100 times in the Bible. There were several things that God wanted His people to see as an abomination to them. Certain foods and lifestyles of many nations were to be seen as an abomination by God's people (Leviticus 11 and 18). The major abomination that God wanted His people to avoid was the way the nations worshiped their gods. *“You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods”* (Deuteronomy 12:31). An abomination is something that is detestable. It is something horrible that happens. Desolation as the word implies means deserted, forsaken, abandoned. This could refer to the physical desolation or the spiritual desolation. And both could happen at the same time. When Jesus left the temple mount for the last time, Matthew recorded Jesus saying, *“See! Your house is left to you desolate”* (23:38). Jerusalem was spiritually desolate when Jesus was no longer present in the city. Jerusalem would become physically desolate when the Romans completely destroyed the city in A.D. 70. 1.1 million Jews died. 97,000 were taken into slavery. This was an abomination that caused great desolation. Is it the final one? Could there be more?

Matthew informed us that the prophet Daniel made a reference to this. In the gospel of Mark there are some older manuscripts that do not include the phrase *“spoken of*

by Daniel the prophet.” Jewish people would have known where this phrase was spoken. They did not need a reference to the prophet Daniel. If this is true, then the phrase was probably added to Mark’s gospel to help Gentiles know where the phrase was spoken. We find the phrase “*the abomination of desolation*” in Daniel 11:31 and 12:11. Daniel also described this with similar words in 8:13 “*the transgression of desolation*” and 9:27 “*And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate.*” Are all these references referring to the same abomination of desolation? No, they refer to different ones. Remember history. Daniel wrote these prophecies after the first temple and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed in 586 B.C. and while the children of Israel were in Babylon, over 500 years before the time of Jesus. Jesus said, “*So when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not.*” This was spoken of by the prophet Daniel. What was Daniel referring to?

Looking at Daniel 11:31, “*And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation.*” Daniel was still referring to this same time when he wrote in chapter 12:1 “*At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time.*” Many people believe that this prophecy of Daniel was referring to the time when Antiochus Epiphanes ruled over the land of Israel, about 170 years before the time of Jesus. He was very cruel. First Maccabees chapter 1 describes some of his reign. Again, we need to know history, even the horrible parts of history to understand what Daniel and Jesus were talking about, so that we are prepared for what is coming and not deceived.

Around 170 years before the birth of Jesus Antiochus Epiphanes ruled the land of Israel. He shed innocent blood on every side of the sanctuary and defiled it. All the articles of gold and silver were taken from the temple. The Jews were not allowed to celebrate any of their feasts or the sabbath. Any scriptures that were found were destroyed. Anyone keeping scriptures were killed. Antiochus Epiphanes forced the Jews to eat unclean food and break the laws of God. Any who did not comply were killed. Families were not allowed to circumcise their newborn sons. Whoever disobeyed were killed and their babies were hung. On the 15th day of the month of Casleu the Romans set up the abomination of desolation upon the altar. On the 25th day of the month they sacrificed pigs and other unclean animals on the altar of God. That was the bronze altar where all the sacrifices were made in front of the entrance to the temple. Daniel referred to this as a time of trouble such as never was up to this point in time. It was an **abomination of desolation**. The things that happened at this time help us understand what we could expect in similar future events. Each one is progressively worse. Eventually the Jews revolted. It was begun by the Maccabees.

They defeated the Romans and cleansed the temple. The festival of Hanukkah, known as the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22) celebrated the restoration of the Temple.

Luke records Jesus differently than Matthew and Mark. Luke does not use the term abomination of desolation. He does point to a desolation. According to Luke, Jesus said, *“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near”* (21:20). Luke’s record sounds more like the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by Titus. This was probably worse than the previous evils that Antiochus Epiphanes did over 200 years earlier. Titus had his Roman soldiers surround Jerusalem. Josephus recorded that 1.1 million Jews died and 97,000 were taken into slavery. The city and the temple were burnt to the ground. This was also an **abomination of desolation**. It definitely met some of the criteria. Yet Jesus said that there would be a coming tribulation that is **the worst of all time** and there would not be a tribulation any greater. Jesus said, *“For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be”* (Mark 13:19). That last phrase, *“nor ever shall be”* means there will never be anything worse. For the Jews the Holocaust in World War II was worse than the previous events. About 6 million Jews died, a third of the world’s Jewish population. Yet, I believe Jesus was saying that there will be another **abomination of desolation**. It will be even worse than the Holocaust. It will be something that will defile a sacred place and cause the place to be left desolate.

Many people believe a third temple will be built. Mark recorded Jesus saying that the abomination of desolation will be *“standing where it ought not.”* Matthew records Jesus saying, *“standing in the holy place”* (24:15). Was Jesus referring to a temple? Can there be a holy place without a temple? The translation I read in Mark 13:14 has *“standing where it ought not”* as if it were a thing and not a person. The Greek word is masculine. It could and maybe should be translated **“he.”** Some newer translations have *“he”* instead of *“it.”* Paul refers to a time and person of great evil in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4. *“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”* It would be nice if the worst was already over, if nothing worse was coming. But when we read through Revelation, we know the worst is yet to come. At least half of the world’s population will die during the opening of the 7 seals (6:8) and the blast of the 7 trumpets (9:15).

What exactly is this last abomination that causes desolation? There are lots of ideas out there. Paul's words give us more insight. A very evil man will rise up and will be an abomination (Revelation 13:1-10). He will cause great desolation. What are we to do? If you are in Judea, flee to the mountains. Jesus did not say Jerusalem. This will be a more world-wide problem. Do not do what the Jews did in A.D. 70. The Christians had left Jerusalem years earlier. When the Jews expected coming problems, they fled into the walled city of Jerusalem for protection. It brought their death. Jesus said, flee to the mountains. Get to higher ground as fast as you can. Do not try and save any of your belongings. It will be worse for those who are pregnant and those who are nursing babies. Pray that this event does not happen in winter. Your prayers do matter to God. It will be worse if this happens in winter.

Jesus said the tribulation will be greater at this time than ever before and will never be worse. Then Jesus said, *"And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days"* (Mark 13:20). Many believe that the prophecy in Daniel 9:27 refers to this last abomination that causes desolation. We are at a point in time where we can destroy ourselves. Those who are not killed in the wars will die from starvation and the plagues that follow. Jesus warned His people, *"Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect"* (Mark 13:21-22). Now, **it is not possible to deceive the elect**. Yet this deception will fool everyone else. Matthew records how Jesus describes His return. *"For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be"* (24:27). All the elect of God will see and know the return of Jesus. He is coming back as He left, in the sky (Acts 1:11).

But what about the rapture? When will that happen? The disciples did not ask your questions. They were concerned about the destruction of the temple and the return of Jesus. With the abomination of desolation, the temple and Jerusalem were destroyed. Now for the return of Jesus next week. What are we to do now? Do not believe any false gospel! Do not follow any false prophets! Trust and follow the person and teachings of Jesus. Share the true gospel and watch for Jesus' return.

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